Performing the identity of the nation in Pirandello's War Short Stories

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Within the larger corpus of Pirandello's novellas, a small group of texts published between 1914 and 1919 may be identified as the direct result of the writer's commitment to narrating his experience of the war. Aged 48 when Italy declared war on Austria in 1915, Pirandello followed both the excited debate on intervention and the opening of the Italian front from the marginalized position he shared with those unfit for combat due to their age or sex: a group of citizens made up of women, children and old or no-longer-young people, cut off from the active part of the nation (in the common perception, male and young) fighting at the front, but at the same time greatly involved in the warfare as recipients of the public discourse on war and as individuals with personal and familial bonds with the combatants.

Immediately after the beginning of the war, Pirandello started working on a novella entitled 'Un'altra vita', whose first two chapters appeared on 25 September 1914 in the journal *La Rassegna Contemporanea*. This was the original core of Pirandello's most famous war short story, 'Berecche e la guerra', which was to become the eponymous text of two collections: the first published in 1919 and including other war-themed texts,[1] the second appearing in 1934 as the second-last volume of the *Novelle per un anno* editorial project. When Italy entered the war in May 1915 and his own eldest son, Stefano, made his way to the front as a volunteer,[2] Pirandello seemed eager to work out his own feelings about the conflict and tackled them fictionally in three novellas written in rapid succession between August and September, 'Colloquii con i personaggi', 'Frammento di cronaca di Marco Leccio e della sua guerra sulla carta nel tempo della grande guerra europea' and 'Jeri e oggi', the latter left unpublished until June 1919. Another two novellas, 'Quando si comprende' and 'Un goj', which appeared respectively in January and December 1916, complete this small 'war corpus', in which one could also include, on a thematic basis, 'La camera in attesa', published in May 1916 and set at the time of the colonial war in Libya.

The dates I mentioned highlight the extremely tight time span in which Pirandello composed these short stories, which can therefore be singled out as a particularly concentrated narrative corpus, also marked by intense intertextuality, to the extent that not only narrative situations, sets and character types recur (weeping mothers, bewildered and

disoriented fathers, war enthusiast children), but also portions of text that transfer from one novella to the other, as is the case of the subplot on watchmaker Livo Truppel that moves from 'Frammento di cronaca di Marco Leccio' to 'Berecche e la guerra'.[3] Yet, notwithstanding this rather uniform appearance, significant ideological shifts are expressed by the characters and, implicitly, by the narrators, thus preventing a one-sided interpretation of Pirandello's war fiction.[4]

In this article I should like to observe the workings of these ideological shifts by analysing some puzzling episodes of intertextuality that show how insistently similar patterns, sets of values and situations are repeated and overturned. Moreover, I would like to interpret this corpus not merely as relevant to Pirandello's views on the Great War, but as a specific case study on identity crisis, in which the writer, rather than expressing his own political views, questions what I will term the performance of the identity of the nation.

'Berecche e la guerra' and 'Frammento di cronaca di Marco Leccio e della sua guerra sulla carta nel tempo della grande guerra europea' share a very similar narrative construction: asyndetic, indeed almost loose, sequences of narrative tableaux rather than tight, coherent, emplotments of events, both stories display humoristic techniques along with open endings that class them as modernist experiments.[5] Federico Berecche is a devotee of German culture and, at least at the very beginning of the story, a neutralist, secretly embarrassed by the anti-German feelings his friends openly express, whereas Marco Leccio, a veteran of the third independence war who has shaped his whole existence as a tribute to Garibaldi's myth, enthusiastically comes out as an unwavering interventionist. Although their patriotic beliefs are entirely unreconcilable, both Marco and Berecche are maniacal characters whose identity is tied up in national imaginings: their education, social habits, feelings and even their children's names express their attempt to embody in everyday life the abstract identity of the nation they feel most deeply attached to.[6] At the same time, the narrators telling their stories often mock the protagonists' actions and beliefs by means of humoristic devices, making it difficult to determine whether a patriotic faith rooted in the heritage of the Risorgimento or a German-oriented ethos is most valued. Probably both in equal measure.

I shall now briefly examine some recurrent themes and situations connecting the two stories. In 'Berecche' the glorious generation of the fathers who built the nation in the 19th century makes its sole appearance as a group of yelling men who argue over the

outcome of the Franco-Prussian war. This image is prompted by the emergence of a childhood memory from the year 1870, whose only relic is a small table, now kept in Berecche's son's bedroom. It was over that table that his father with his friends set down maps on which they childishly followed the progress of the fighting armies:

Farsetti sgarbati, abbottonati fino al collo e calzoni larghi, a tubo. Baffi insegati e moschetta alla Napoleone III o barba a collana alla Cavour. Curvi su quella carta geografica, segnavano col dito la via degli eserciti, secondo le indicazioni e le previsioni degli scarsi e tardivi giornali d'allora, e parlavano accesi, e nessuno lasciava quieto su questa o quella traccia il dito dell'altro. Un altro dito, e poi un altro, e un altro: ciascuno voleva metterci il suo.[7]

It is worth noting that 1870 is also the year of the capture of Rome and hence of the accomplishment of the unification of Italy. Committed to playing the wars of others instead of fighting their own, these men vividly clash with the portrayal of the heroic combatants dying on the battlefield of Bezzecca, as presented in 'Frammento':

A diciott'anni Marco Leccio prese parte alla campagna del Trentino con Defendente Leccio, suo padre, e con un certo Casimiro Sturzi, suo amico da fratello, coetaneo, orfano di padre e di madre. Perdette a Bezzecca, nella famosa carica alla baionetta, il padre e l'amico. Non ebbe neanche il tempo di piangerli. All'amico, mentre gli spirava tra le braccia raccomandandogli la sorella Marianna che restava sola al mondo, promise che, se fosse scampato alla morte, il che non era sicuro, date le difficoltà di quella campagna; ma se fosse scampato, la sorella l'avrebbe sposata lui.[8]

This contrast becomes even more puzzling if one thinks of Marco who, unfit for combat and yet eager to die for his motherland, ends up playing out the new war on maps – just as Berecche's father and his fellows do – shut off in a room cluttered with the relics of his glorious past:

Non potevano dunque restare offesi tutti quei libri di storia del risorgimento e quei ritratti e quelle stampe guerresche e quelle sciabole e quello schioppettone da una prima grande carta geografica, teatro della guerra sul fronte occidentale, fissata su una tavola da

ingegnere sorretta da cavalletti; poi da una seconda carta non meno grande, teatro della guerra sul fronte orientale, su un'altra tavola sorretta anch'essa da cavalletti; poi, da una terza, più piccola, della Balcania fino all'Asia Minore; e ora infine dalle due ultime, della guerra nostra: la carta del Trentino e l'altra della Venezia Giulia.[9]

Old and miserable Tiralli, a former comrade in the War of Independence who sometimes joins Marco in his war games, stands out as an icon of a now-faded Risorgimento, a powerful human allegory of an obsolete set of beliefs, to be employed only in funeral processions:

Non mangia tutti i giorni il reduce Tiralli, ma tutti i giorni si pettina bene i molti capelli lanosi, che per grazia di Dio gli sono rimasti; tutti i giorni s'industria a lungo a far la barba con un mozzicone di candela al suo colletto inamidato, ai suoi polsini ingialliti e sfilacciati. Se porta sempre al petto le medaglie, non è per vanagloria, ma per distrarre l'attenzione dei passanti dalle sue scarpe e dal suo vestito, e poi perché non passa giorno che non faccia servizio d'accompagnamento funebre.[10]

If we return to 'Berecche', the lack of Risorgimental feelings of the protagonist is counterbalanced by the letter his son sends to his relatives after fleeing to France to join the Entente armies as a volunteer:

Ora la povera Italia, neppur certa d'essere stata licenziata, non sa che fare né dove andare. Ha paura degli antichi padroni, e ha paura di mettersi a servizio di nuovi che dalle agenzie di collocamento, dette Ambasciate, la richiedono e le fanno pressanti esibizioni. […] *c'è pure in Italia… niente, un po' di gioventù sprecata, anche un po' di gioventù che non sa fare i conti e non sa essere accorta e prudente, un po' di gioventù, ecco.*[11]

A patchwork of interventionist rhetoric rehashing Garibaldian myths, well-worn topoi[12] and the imaginary of ardent youth, Fausto's letter has been interpreted as half parody of d'Annunzio's propagandistic speeches and half genuine expression of the younger generation's point of view. The pathetic climax of this scene, in which the entire family is moved by the reading of the letter, is not only overemphasized by a general outburst of tears but also humouristically – in the Pirandellian sense of the term –

deconstructed, as it closes on the grotesque detail of Fongi's big nose made runny by the excess of weeping. Pietro Milone appropriately reads the ambivalence at the core of the letter as the effect of a compromise formation, a Freudian concept brilliantly reworked by literary theoretician Francesco Orlando:[13] Pirandello cannot make his identification with the younger generation explicit and thus he expresses their bold eagerness to fight with the words of his literary rival. Parodying d'Annunzio's patriotic rhetoric has a powerfully liberating effect: by means of words he apparently despises, Pirandello can give voice to the otherwise unutterable desire to join the enthusiastic interventionist youth.

The motif of the letter from the son in action at the front also recurs in 'Frammento di cronaca': here it is Marco's youngest child who writes to his family. His calm and courage is revealed as he describes a quiet night-time scene, rendered poignant by the image of a beautiful white butterfly:

Tutto l'accampamento tace. È notte alta. Sto nella mia tenda seduto sulla branda, il calamaio sulla coperta, e scrivo sulla gamba sinistra. La fucileria crepita lontano tra le cannonate. […] *Posata sul fucile vicino alla candela è un'elegantissima farfalla bianca, con le ali spiegate e le antenne ritte. È immobile da tanto tempo.*[14]

One could wonder about the meaning of this idyllic picture and, in the light of the other letter, even interpret it as an antiphrastic device. The text, however, is almost entirely taken from a letter Stefano Pirandello sent to his father in August 1915[15] and therefore, far from being aimed at producing a parodic effect, seriously conveys the existential mood of Berecche's son's letter, while amending its most rhetorical features. The re-occurrence of the theme of the letter combined with the use of non-fictional personal writings by his own son suggests that Pirandello feared that the discourse of the Risorgimento and its updated interventionist versions could not be uttered without the risk of inauthenticity or without sounding obsolete, and, therefore, that the line separating genuine patriotism and rhetorical clichés was dangerously blurred. The use of Stefano's letter, written at the front when under the very real threat of death, seems to work as an anti-rhetorical device: interventionist faith turns out to be at once trivially abused and dramatically authentic.

If we expand this intertextual inquiry, we do not find unequivocal answers. In the first part of 'Colloquii con i personaggi', the writer as represented in the story is upset by the outbreak of the war and confronts a character who purposefully ignores what is

happening and indeed urges the writer himself to do the same, not for the sake of egoistic indifference but because of a drastic change of perspective: a universal perspective, which quietly accepts changes and destruction as natural laws of life and functions independently from history and human accidents.

Lei è così, e crede per ora ingenuamente che tutto, per il fatto della guerra, debba cambiare. Che vuole che cambi? Che contano i fatti? Per enormi che siano, sempre fatti sono. Passano. Passano, con gli individui che non sono riusciti a superarli. La vita resta, con gli stessi bisogni, con le stesse passioni, per gli stessi istinti, uguale sempre, come se non fosse mai nulla: ostinazione bruta e quasi cieca, che fa pena. La terra è dura, e la vita è di terra. Un cataclisma, una catastrofe, guerre, terremoti la scacciano da un punto; vi ritorna poco dopo, uguale, come se nulla fosse stato.[16]

In addition to reworking a very Pirandellian twist of perspective, famously displayed, for instance, in the 'Premessa filosofica' of *Il fu Mattia Pascal*,[17] this passage resonates with Berecche's reflections on the meaning of the war. Secluded in his study at home, unwilling to join his family for dinner, he contemplates the present as if he were placed at a sidereal distance from it:

La vede per gli spazii senza fine, come forse nessuna o appena forse qualcuna di quelle stelle la può vedere, questa piccola Terra che va e va, senza un fine che si sappia, per quegli spazii di cui non si sa la fine. Va, granellino infimo, gocciolina d'acqua nera, e il vento della corsa cancella in uno striscio violento di tenue barlume i segni accesi dell'abitazione degli uomini in quella poca parte in cui non è liquido. […] C'è qualcuno che pensi che nei cieli non c'è tempo? Che tutto s'inabissa e vanisce in questo vuoto tenebroso senza fine? E che su questo granellino, domani, tra mille anni, non sarà più nulla o ben poco si dirà di questa guerra ch'ora ci sembra immane e formidabile?[18]

A history teacher, Berecche seems to discard the historical dimension of human existence, very much in line with the reasoning of the anonymous character of 'Colloquii'. History, however, takes centre stage in the second part of 'Colloquii', as the writer is visited by the shadow of his mother. The authentic, painful, patriotic faith of the mother, who recalls the story of her family during the conquest of Sicily by Garibaldi, does not undergo

any humoristic downplaying and, because of its extreme closeness to Pirandello's biography, this novella may be judged as the one most closely reflecting the author's true stance.[19] However, if we place the mother against the larger backdrop of the corpus, she proves to be an exception. Accordingly, 'Quando si comprende' and 'Jeri e oggi', which are in fact two different perspectives on the same story of a young officer leaving for the front, respectively consolidate the myth of the soldier's grieving mother and ridicule it by matching an icon of crying motherhood, almost unable to utter a single word, with a prostitute who easily recovers from the loss of one of her lovers:[20]

Da tre mesi quella madre, lì nascosta sotto la mantiglia, cercava in tutto ciò che il marito e gli altri le dicevano per confortarla e indurla a rassegnarsi, una parola, una parola sola che, nella sordità del suo cupo dolore, le destasse un'eco, le facesse intendere come possibile per una madre la rassegnazione a mandare il figlio, non già alla morte, ma solo a un probabile rischio di vita.[21] ('Quando si comprende')

– Oh, guarda là, quella che piangeva per tutti!
La giovane si voltò, senz'ira, senza sdegno.
– Povera mamma buona e stupida, - le disse con quello sguardo. – E non capisci che la vita è così? Jeri ho pianto per uno. Bisogna che oggi rida per quest'altro.[22] ('Jeri e oggi')

If the sorrowful shadow of the mother in 'Colloquii' can be read as an allegory of the motherland, at the other end of the spectrum, the sardonic Daniele Catellani, the Jew protagonist of 'Un goj', seems to resist any national, political, and even religious identity by means of an uncanny joke: on Christmas Eve he converts Jesus' miniature crèche, carefully set up by his ultra-catholic father-in-law, into a battlefield crowded with toy soldiers and dotted with the flags of all the armies involved in the war, an even more humouristic, disturbing version of the plastic models and maps employed by Berecche and Marco Leccio in the desperately foolish war games they played at home:

soldatini di stagno, ma tanti, ma tanti, eserciti di soldatini di stagno, d'ogni nazione, francesi e tedeschi, italiani e austriaci, russi e inglesi, serbi e rumeni, bulgari e turchi, belgi e americani e ungheresi e montenegrini, tutti coi fucili spianati contro la grotta di Bethlehem,

e poi, e poi tanti cannoncini di piombo, intere batterie, d'ogni foggia, d'ogni dimensione, puntati anch'essi di su, di giù, da ogni parte, tutti contro la grotta di Bethlehem, i quali avrebbero fatto veramente un nuovo e graziosissimo spettacolo.[23]

Even considering the writer's personal opinions, cultural background and political trajectory, it would be impossible to label these short stories as either patriotic endorsements or unfaltering anti-war statements. To scrutinise the writer's political stances as reworked into narrative form may prove disappointing and become nothing more than a loose collection of positions inconsistent with each other, in which refusal of the war, nostalgia for the Risorgimento and interventionist passion ambiguously and a-dialectically intertwine. Indeed, there is no single ideological solution that develops from the first war novella, 'Berecche', to the last, 'Un goj'. Rather, the author seems to obsessively examine and reexamine a specific case of identity crisis, that undergone by those unable to rethink their social and gender roles against the backdrop of the nation at war. What must be explored, therefore, is not the ideological inconsistency of this small set of novellas as a possible result of the author's wavering views, but rather these very inconsistencies as an effect of the identity trouble perturbing marginalized subjects within the body of the nation.

Pedagogy and the performative are, in Homi Bhabha's terms, the two central moments into which nationalism is split, the former being a static set of concepts, images and ideological beliefs, the latter being the everyday embodiment of this set in people's lives.[24] The performative neither coincides with pedagogy nor simply denies it. Rather, it opens up new processes of signification and rewrites locally, in actual flesh and blood, what pedagogy keeps general, abstract and essential. This translation, however, can produce not just divergences between concepts and practices, it can indeed cause practices – performances – to separate dramatically from theories and consequently produce a loss of identity instead of an enhancement of it. Given this theoretical premise, we may reformulate the issue at stake in Pirandello's novellas in the following terms: What happens when nationalist discourse is uttered by those who are no longer in the position of taking up an active role in the defence of the nation? What unexpected, unsettling, readjustments of identity emerge when nationalist pedagogy is performed by those at the margins of the nation?

Modern nationalism, as fundamental seminal studies by historian George Mosse demonstrated, relies on a strongly gendered idea of the nation, which is a homosocial male community whose members must prove that their virility is an instrument for defending the motherland and securing its future existence by procreation.[25] On a transnational basis the literature of the Great War has imagined and narrated the volunteers' enthusiastic participation in the conflict also as a great rite of re-virilization.[26] Pirandello's novellas observe this social fantasy of manliness lost and regained from the extraordinary point of view of those whose gender role was distressingly challenged by the outbreak of the war. This is the core of the identity crisis these male characters undergo: they carry on performing their gender identity as if it still matched the biopolitical needs of the nation, whereas the nation has cloistered them within the social limbo reserved for powerless citizens such as children and women.

As Marco decides, on the anniversary of the battle of Bezzecca, to enlist with his son Giacomo, don Agostino, a priest and family friend, compares Marco's vain desire to fight at the front to the unnatural ambition of a woman eager to become a man.

La volontà […] dico la loro volontà, gli uomini la vogliono salvare a ogni costo; e quand'essa non sappia stare nei limiti del possibile, per salvarla, la chiamano velleità. Se una donna vuole esser uomo, se un vecchio vuole esser giovane… velleità! Cose ridicole e pietosissime.[27]

The comparison, made by a non-virile subject such as a priest, reveals how deep, on a metaphoric level, the connection was felt to be between the inability to fight and feminine passivity. Furthermore, Marco's body, tortured by a long-term inflammation of the sciatic nerve and disfigured by painful scars, forces him to spend long periods of time in bed without gaining any relief. To lie supine is, according to Marco's view, the very opposite of what a brave soldier should do. His harsh polemic against modern warfare and military strategy pivots precisely around the image of combatants cowardly sneaking around, unable to stand up straight and face the enemy bravely:

La strategia, imbecilli! L'arte di far durare un secolo una battaglia, che prima con l'impeto dei soldati e il genio dei capitani si risolveva in quattro e quattr'otto, in una giornata al più! […] Prima gli uomini combattevano in piedi, come Dio li aveva messi!

Nossignori, adesso, non basta in ginocchio, pancia a terra, come le serpi e rintanati, chi sappia resistervi; noi no, i nostri no, per la Madonna! balzano in piedi, irrompono, si avventano a petto, bajonetta in canna, «Savoja!».[28]

A defence mechanism is at work here: branding modern soldiers as potential cowards protects Marco from the anxiety of seeing his own virility undermined and leads him to claim his generation as the only one capable of assaulting the enemy with a bayonet.[29]
Similarly, Berecche's devotion to German culture relies on an idea of discipline which implies repression, control and rationality as opposed to feminine fury: while 'Berecche ragiona' [Berecche reasons], as the title of the story's seventh chapter reads, his wife is driven mad by the departure of the son, while three undifferentiated 'zitellone' [spinsters] surround her as a metaphor of irrational and asexualized femininity:

- Qua per compatire chi m'accusa! qua per compiangere con quelle due disgraziate anche questa miserabile Italia, donna come loro, che non avrà mai ciò che si chiama DISCIPLINA DELLA VITA![30]

Recalling the image of the motherland as a woman employed by his son in his letter from France, Berecche replaces in his mind a non-virile Italy with a manlier form of life, one that is as hard and straight as the 'duri' and 'ritti' Gothic fonts of the brewery he used to frequent.[31] Yet Berecche is unconsciously closer to a softer version of German culture, that embodied by his Swiss son-in-law Livo Truppel, a peaceful, contemplative character who falls victim to interventionist violence. Livo is a tender, vulnerable, and feminized figure, living in time – emblematically, he is a watchmaker – rather than in space and indeed resisting any specific national identity.

Tondo tondo, biondo biondo, il signor Livo si buttò avanti, parando con le manine bianche grassocce, con gli occhi pieni di lagrime, quegli occhi che di solito hanno la limpida chiarità ridente dello zaffiro, a gridare a quei dimostranti ch'egli era svizzero e non Tedesco, svizzero e non Tedesco, svizzero, svizzero, da più di venticinque anni in Italia, e genero di un italiano, il signor professor Berecche.[32]

Livo's character was born in the pages of 'Frammento di cronaca' and relocated to 'Berecche e la guerra' in the version published in 1934, apparently with very slight narrative motive. Indeed, this addition has been considered rather clumsy by critics.[33] Yet if we turn to the metaphoric level, Livo appears as a necessary counterpart to Berecche, one who shares with him the pleasure of contemplating the stars at night: 'Guarda anche lui, come il suocero, quelle stelle; sogna senza sogni, e sospira'.[34]

It is this contemplative attitude, alongside the unspoken correspondence between the two characters, that discloses Berecche's unconscious fragility and passivity. The outburst of the war, and especially the implicit rivalry with his son who has fled to the front, urge him to further repress his non-virile traits. Since he can no longer rely on the power of repression embodied by German culture, he must perform his identity on radically different ground. It is in this experience of displacement that the pedagogy of the Risorgimento inspires his last attempt to perform the identity of the nation. Planning to enlist, Berecche learns from books the postures and gestures of a perfect horseman and, armed with this theoretical knowledge, starts attending a horsemanship course held by a master with a German name (Felder), as if, notwithstanding his recent contempt for Germany, he had come full circle to his original mastering cultural ethos. Keen on practicing, but still insufficiently skilled, Berecche launches into a crazy ride keeping his eyes closed, which results in a tragi-comic fall. In this moment of blindness, Berecche sees himself alongside the Garibaldini charging at an indefinite enemy, just behind his own son, as if their roles were definitively inverted, the father following the son, the son leading the father:[35]

E via, frustrando il cavallo, si lancia di nuovo al galoppo per la pesta, con gli occhi chiusi, rituffandosi nella violenta visione dei garibaldini alla carica, con Faustino alla testa. E più il suo ragazzo gli corre davanti con la camicia rossa e la bajonetta in canna, e più lui frusta il cavallo; avanti! avanti! viva l'Italia! Ah come son rosse quelle camìce! Un po' di gioventù… un po' di gioventù sprecata![36]

At the end of the novella, a bandaged Berecche, appears as an icon of suffering motherhood, holding in his arms his little blind daughter Ghetina.[37] A feminine condition of unutterable pain and passivity haunts Berecche, who seems to regress towards a motionless natural status, a state precluded from history and social life.[38]

This clash between nature and history resonates with the opposition between the two parts of *Colloquii con i personaggi*, which are apparently inconsistent with each other in that the former claims a timeless, universal and anti-human perspective, whereas the latter discloses the meaning of human existence as unavoidably sited in history. Yet, the perspective on history disclosed in the second part emanates from a female subject, emotionally involved in historical change but at the same time secluded and devoid of agency:

E la so ora, la tua pena, figlio, che forse è la stessa che a me, donna, mi bruciò tanto nell'anima: di non poter fare e di veder fare agli altri quello che avremmo voluto far noi.[39]

Seen with the eyes of a powerless woman, history stops conflicting with the wider perspective of nature, where changes have no meaning and space and time turn into infinite dimensions. At the same time, the mother cannot be in the end entirely identified with the anonymous character of the first part of *Colloquii*: she at the same time reveals history to be a construction that engenders no real change and voices the pain that history itself causes. The absence of humoristic devices in the second part of *Colloquii* demonstrates that, in deconstructing human agency, at this stage of his creative trajectory Pirandello fully acknowledged history as the sole dimension in which human beings are situated as passive spectators. Therefore, the mother is ultimately the character who best matches the collapse of the writer's own identity faced with the catastrophe of the war.

Yet, this troubling powerlessness, in which old age and femininity coincide, is in itself ambivalent, as an allegorical image at the end of the novella seems to suggest:

Gli alti giovani fusti d'acacia del mio giardino, dalle dense chiome, indolenti s'abbandonano al vento che li scapiglia e par debba spezzarli. Ma essi godono femineamente di sentirsi così aprire e scomporre le chiome e seguono il vento con elastica flessibilità. È un moto d'onda o di nuvola, e non li desta dal sogno che chiudono in sé.[40]

If, on the one hand, the layered description of these young and still indolent trees, overwhelmed by the violence of the wind, hints at the power of history to annihilate those at the margins of history itself, on the other it releases a repressed content: their feminine passivity proves to be as painful as it is enjoyable ('femineamente godono').[41] It is in the light of this ambivalence that the gender trouble affecting male characters in Pirandello's

war novellas should be interpreted: even as powerless subjects, there is indeed an unutterable pleasure in standing still.

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1. The collection *Berecche e la guerra* (Milan, Facchi Editore, 1919) includes the first part of 'Colloqui con i personaggi', 'Berecche e la guerra', and 'Frammento di cronaca di Marco Leccio e della sua guerra sulla carta nel tempo della grande guerra europea'.
2. See *Il figlio prigioniero: carteggio tra Luigi e Stefano Pirandello durante la guerra 1915-1918*, edited by A. Pirandello (Milan, Mondadori, 2005).
3. On intertextuality as self-plagiarism in Pirandello's narrative see C. O'Rawe, *Authorial Echoes. Textuality and Self-Plagiarism in the Narrative of Luigi Pirandello* (London, Legenda, 2005).
4. In a recent paper, Giovanni De Leva cleverly discusses the ideological impasse haunting Pirandello's war novellas. See G. De Leva, 'La guerra sulla carta: Pirandello allo scoppio del primo conflitto mondiale', in *Transpostcross*, 4, 1 (2014), http://www.transpostcross.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=99:la-guerra-sulla-carta&catid=11:saggi&Itemid=10.
5. Julie Dashwood underscores how the humoristic character of the novella is 'interrupted by digressions, analepsis, radical shifts in perspective and multiple viewpoints'. See J. Dashwood, 'Introduction', in L. Pirandello, *Berecche and the War*, introduced and translated by J. Dashwood (Market Harborough, Troubador, 2000, pp. 1-23), p. 20. According to Riccardo Castellana, the war-themed novellas ushered in a new phase – a modernist phase proper – in Pirandello's writings. See R. Castellana, 'La novella modernista in Italia. Pirandello e Tozzi', in *La forma breve del narrare. Novelle,* contes, short stories, edited by L. Innocenti (Pisa, Pacini Editore, 2013, pp. 183-204).
6. Marco's children are named after Garibaldi's relatives' names, whereas Berecche, expressing his devotion to German culture, has given his children the names of Fausto, Carlotta and Margherita, those of Goethe's most famous fictional characters, Faust and Gretchen from *Faust* and Charlotte from *Elective Affinities*.
7. 'Ill-fitting jackets buttoned right up to the neck and wide, straight-legged trousers. Waxed moustaches and a tuft of hair on the lower lip like Napoleon III or beards running under their chin from ear to ear like Cavour. Bending over that map they were tracing the routes taken by the armies with their fingers, according to the information and forecasts in the few, out-of-date

newspapers of that time, and they talked excitedly and no-one allowed the finger of one of the others to linger peacefully on any particular trail. Another finger came along, and then another and another: everyone wanted to put in his own' (*Na* III, 583). Translation taken from L. Pirandello, *Berecche and the War*, introduced and translated by J. Dashwood (Market Harborough, Troubador, 2000), p. 36. Lucio Lugnani, in his commentary of *Tutte le novelle*, appropriately links this scene to a passage from *I Viceré* by De Roberto in which Ferdinando il Babbeo maniacally 'plays' at the Franco-Prussian war with maps and flags (see L. Pirandello, *Tutte le novelle*, III, edited and commented by L. Lugnani, Milano, Rizzoli, 2007, pp. 684-685). Julie Dashwood has explored this link with De Roberto in her article 'De Roberto and Pirandello: Mapping the War' in *The Risorgimento of Federico De Roberto*, edited by J. Dashwood and M. Ganeri (Oxford, Peter Lang, 2009, pp. 111-120).

8. 'At 18 Marco Leccio took part in the Trentino campaign along with his father Defendente Leccio and a certain Casimiro Sturzi, his bosom friend, who was the same age as him and who had lost both his father and mother. During the famous bayonet charge of the battle of Bezzecca, he lost both his father and his friend. He did not even have the time to mourn them. His friend, as he lay dying in his arms, asked him to take care of his sister Marianna; he promised him that, if he escaped death, which was by no means certain, considering the difficulties of the campaign; he promised that, had he survived, he would marry her' (*Na* III, 1167).
9. 'All those books on the history of the Risorgimento and those portraits and martial prints and those sabres and that large musket would not be offended by a first large geographical map representing the war theatre on the western front, fastened to a drafting table supported by a trestle; and by a second map, just as big, representing the war theatre on the eastern front, laid out on another table also supported by a trestle; then by a third smaller map spanning the territory from the Balkans to Anatolia; and now finally by the last two maps of our war: the map of Trentino and that of Venezia Giulia' (*Na* III, 1181).
10. 'Veteran Tiralli does not eat every day, but every day he carefully combs the thick frizzy hair that thank God he still has; everyday he works hard to shave his starched collar and his yellowed and frayed cuffs with the end of a candle. If he always wears his medals on his breast, he does not do so in empty ostentation of glory, but to divert the passers-by's attention from his shoes and suit, and also because a day doesn't go by without him serving as a mourner in some funeral procession' (*Na* III, 1184).
11. 'Now poor Italy, who isn't even sure that she's been dismissed, doesn't know what to do or where to go. She's afraid of her old masters, and she's afraid of taking service with new ones which via the employment agencies called Embassies, are asking for her and making her pressing offers. […] there is, even in Italy… nothing really, a bit of wasted youth, and a bit of

youth which doesn't know how to do the accounts or to be astute and prudent, in short, a bit of real youth' (*Na* III, 613). Translation by J. Dashwood, pp. 59-60.

12. A long-standing topos that can be traced back to the Renaissance – Machiavelli claims Italy is a slave that needs to be freed from foreign powers in the last chapter of his *Il Principe* – the image of Italy as a feminine nation was central in nineteenth-century Italian political thought and Risorgimental rhetoric. See S. Patriarca, *Italianità. La costruzione del carattere nazionale* (Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2010, pp. 3-37).
13. According to Francesco Orlando, a compromise formation consists in the coexistence of two opposite drives – both on a formal and an ideological level – within a literary text. This concept may be tracked back to Freudian theory and is one of the cornerstones of Orlando's theory as laid out in his essay *Per una teoria freudiana della letteratura* (Turin, Einaudi, 1987). See P. Milone, '"Un'altra vita"? Pirandello, la guerra e l'arte', in *Pirandello e la politica: Atti del XXVIII convegno internazionale*, edited by E. Lauretta (Agrigento, Centro nazionale di studi pirandelliani, 1992, pp. 109-160), p. 122. Julie Dashwood considers the use of d'Annunzio's rhetoric as 'ideologically blinding' ('Introduction', p. 19)
14. 'The whole camp is silent. It is the dead of night. I sit on the camp bed in my tent, the inkpot on the blanket, and write with the paper propped on my left leg. Distant gunfire crackles among cannon shots. […] A very elegant white butterfly lies on the gun beside the candle, its wings unfolded and its antennae straight. She has been still for a long time' (*Na* III, 1200).
15. See *Il figlio prigioniero*, pp. 51-52.
16. 'This is what you are like, and for now you naively believe that everything must change because of the war. What do you think it will change? What do facts matter? Even if they are enormous, they are just facts. They pass. They pass along with the individuals who were not able to get past them. Life remains always the same, with the same needs, the same passions, the same instincts, as if nothing existed: a brutal and blind obstinacy, which is pitiful. The earth is tough and life is made of earth. A cataclysm, a catastrophe, wars, earthquakes can displace it, and still it returns to the same point soon after, identical, as if nothing had happened' (*Na* III, 1141).
17. See *Tr I*, pp. 322-324.
18. 'He sees this little planet Earth in endless space, as perhaps none or maybe just one of those stars can see it, going on and on, for no known purpose, in that space whose end is unknown. It goes on, the basest of specks of dust, a tiny drop of black water, and the wind, as it speeds along, cancels out the lights marking the places where men live, in that very small part where the speck is not liquid, turning them into a violent, faintly glimmering blur. […] Are there some who believe there is no time in the heavens? That everything is swallowed up and disappears in this dark, endless void? And that on this very same speck, tomorrow, in a thousand years,

nothing will remain or scarcely a thing will be said of this war which now seems so appalling and dreadful to us?' (*Na* III, 595-596). Translation by J. Dashwood, p. 46.

19. Michael Subialka interestingly eschews common interpretations of motherhood in Pirandello's writing and interprets the mother of 'Colloquii' as a character embodying an ethical stance. See M. Subialka, 'Pirandello's Mother: Feminine Perception and Double Vision', *PSA Journal*, XXVI (2013), pp. 71-95.
20. These are indeed the two polarized sides of Pirandello's female world, as Roberto Alonge argues: according to him, the double identity as a mother and a woman is 'un tabù, una scena negata' [a taboo, a denied scene]. See R. Alonge, *Madri, baldracche, amanti: la figura femminile nel teatro di Pirandello* (Genova, Costa & Nolan, 1997, p. 66). Similarly, Ann Caesar brilliantly claims that in Pirandello's works the female world is split into the realm of the self-abnegating mother and that of the woman, the former foreclosing the latter in that she is fully sexualised. See A. H. Caesar, *Characters and Authors in Luigi Pirandello* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998, p. 126). See also, for a general perspective on gender in Pirandello's theatre, M. Günsberg, *Patriachal Representations: Gender and Discourse in Pirandello's Theatre* (Oxford & Providence, Berg, 1994).
21. 'For three months, that mother, hidden under her mantilla, had been looking for one word amongst the many things her husband and the others said to her to comfort her and induce her to resign herself, just one word that, in the deafness of her dark pain, could elicit some echo and make her understand how it was possible for a mother to resign herself to sending her son away, let us not say to certain death, but even just to a probable risk of his life' (*Na* II, 680).
22. '– Oh, look, the one who used to cry for everyone!
    The young woman turned back, with no anger, no resentment.
    - Poor, stupid, good mummy, - her eyes said – Don't you understand that life is like this? Yesterday I cried for one guy. Today I must laugh for this other one' (*Na* II, 565).
23. 'So many tin soldiers, armies of tin soldiers, of every nation, French and German, Italian and Austrian, Russian and English, Serbian and Rumanian, Bulgarian and American and Hungarian and Montenegrin, all with guns levelled against Bethlehem's Grotto, and then, and then, so many little lead cannons, entire batteries of every kind and of every size, all of them pointing up, or down and everywhere, all levelled against Bethlehem's Grotto – all of which would have made a novel and truly graceful spectacle (*Na* I, 566).
24. See H. Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation' in *Nation and Narration*, edited by H. Bhabha (London and New York, Routledge, 1990, pp. 291-322).
25. See G. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York, H. Fertig, 1985) and *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1996).

26. A vast bibliography exists on this topic. For a transnational panorama see at least M. Ekstein, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (London, Papermac, 1989). For the Italian context see E. Gentile, *Apocalisse. La Grande Guerra per l'uomo nuovo* (Milan, Mondadori, 2008) and A. M. Banti, *Sublime madre nostra. La nazione italiana dal Risorgimento al fascism* (Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2011).
27. 'Will […] I mean their will, men want to save it at all costs and, when it cannot keep within the limits of the possible, in order to save it, they call it vain ambition. If a woman wants to be a man, if an old man wants to be a young man… vain ambitions! Ridiculous and most pathetic things!' (*Na* III, 1173).
28. 'Strategy, idiots! The art of making a battle last a century, whereas once everything was settled in no time thanks to the ardour of the soldiers and the intelligence of the captains, in a day at the most! […] Once men fought standing, as God had made them! No sir, now, as if kneeling were not enough, they lie flat on their stomach like snakes and even hide away, if they can bear it; not us, not ours, by the Virgin Mary! They jump up, rush out, and charge, their chest forward, their bayonets lowered, "Savoja!"" (*Na* III, 1187).
29. John Horne pinpoints the technology of modern warfare as the cause of the destabilization of stereotypes of masculinity. See J. Horne, *Masculinity in politics and war in the age of nation-states and world wars, 1850-1950*, in *Masculinities in Politics and War. Gendering Modern History*, edited by S. Dudink, K. Hagemann and J. Tosh (Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2004) pp. 22-40.
30. '- Right here, so as to feel pity for my accusers! right here to sympathize both with those two poor, unfortunate women and with this wretched Italy of ours, a woman like them, which will never have what is called a SENSE OF DISCIPLINE' (*Na* III, p. 609). Translation by J. Dashwood, p. 56.
31. In his commentary (III, p. 679) Lugnani reads the Gothic fonts of the brewery as a metaphor of German culture's toughness.
32. 'Very round and very blond, Mr Livo flung himself forward, trying to ward them off with his little fat, white hands, with his eyes full of tears, those eyes which usually have the limpid, smiling clarity of sapphires, to shout at those demonstrators that he was Swiss, not German, Swiss not German, Swiss, Swiss and had been in Italy for more than twenty-five years, and was the son-in-law of an Italian, a teacher, Mr Berecche' (*Na* III, 601). Translation by J. Dashwood, p 50.
33. According to Lugnani, this chapter on Livo Truppel was added to the novella 'senza ragioni narrative plausibili' [with no plausible narrative reasons]. See Lugnani's commentary, III, p. 690.
34. 'Like his father-in-law he looks at those stars; he dreams dreamlessly, and he sighs' (*Na* III, 599). Translation by J. Dashwood, p. 49.

35. Julie Dashwood, referring to the relationship between Berecche and his two 'sons' (his real son Fausto and Gino Viesi, his daughter's boyfriend), speaks of 'Oedipal struggle' ('Introduction', p. 19)
36. 'And he's off, whipping up his horse, off again at a gallop across the arena, with his eyes closed, plunging back into the violent vision of the Garibaldi legion at the charge, with Faustino at their head. And the faster his boy goes in front of him in his red shirt and his bayonet fixed, the harder he whips his horse; onwards! onwards! onwards! long live Italy! Oh, how red those shirts are! A bit of youth… A bit of wasted youth!' (*Na* III, 620). Translation by J. Dashwood, p. 64.
37. Julie Dashwood brilliantly defines Berecche holding his daughter 'a *pater doloroso*, an icon not for life but for death' ('Introduction', p. 21). Michael Subialka compellingly interprets the final scene of the novella as marking a shift from Berecche's full identification with German culture to an ethics of compassion based on human relationships rather than on national imaginings. See M. Subialka, 'Modernism at War: Pirandello and the Crisis of (German) Cultural Identity', in *Annali d'Italianistica*, 33 (2015), pp. 75-97.
38. In particular, a Nietzschean conflict between history and nature is central to the ending of *Uno, nessuno e centomila*, with Vitangelo shutting himself off from civilization, as Pasquale Guaragnella, among others, argues in his 'Dal "dono" a un "ospizio" di mendicità. Su *Uno, nessuno e centomila* di Pirandello', in *Il matto e il povero. Temi e figure in Pirandello, Sbarbaro e Vittorini* (Bari, Dedalo, 2000, pp. 47-107).
39. 'I know! And now I know your pain, son, which is perhaps the same as that which burned so much in my soul, as a woman: to not be able to do anything and to watch others do what we would have liked to do ourselves' (*Na* III, 1151). Translation taken from L. Pirandello, 'A Conversation with my mother', translated by M. Aloisio and M. Subialka, in *PSA Journal*, XXVI (2013), pp. 97-107 (p. 102).
40. 'In my garden, the tall, young acacia branches, dense with foliage, lazily abandon themselves to the wind that ruffles them and seems sure to break them. But they take a feminine pleasure in feeling their foliage open and separate like that, and they follow the wind with an elastic flexibility. It is the motion of a wave or a cloud, and it does not rouse them from the dream that they hold inside themselves' (*Na* III, 1153). Translation by M. Aloisio and M. Subialka, p. 104.
41. In his commentary (III, p. 713), Lucio Lugnani interprets this passage as an expression of contempt for the femininity the trees embody. I see it rather as a compromise formation revealing the deep and full identification between the writer and the mother.

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